

House Education Commission Remarks

Anne Kloth and Lawrence Kloth Jr.

We applaud the desire and expectations that all 3rd graders should be reading at grade level. Unfortunately, there are contributing factors which are preventing these 3rd graders from living up to the desired expectations.

The leading contributing factor as to why these children are not reading is dyslexia, a neurologically based, inherited condition which varies in degrees of severity from mild, to moderate, to severe, to profound. Dyslexia impacts a student's ability to learn in all subjects including English, Sciences, Social Sciences and Math.

According to the National Institute of Health, dyslexia impacts at least 20% of the United States population which is at least 1 out of every 5 individuals. In a classroom of 30 students there would be 5-6 students with some degree of dyslexia. Dyslexia is a hidden disability which affects individuals regardless of race, gender, culture or socioeconomic status. Dyslexics have average or above average intelligence but are often seen as being inattentive or lazy because they are not reading at grade level. Dyslexia often causes poor self-esteem, lack of confidence and a poor self-image of themselves as a student. Dyslexia is a life-long disability with no cure but with remediation and accommodations dyslexics can lead successful lives. Some dyslexics will also have ADD or ADHD or another learning disability such as dysgraphia (handwriting disability), and dyscalculia (math disability).

80% of all individuals with a learning disability have trouble with reading which is dyslexia. 40% of all individuals with ADD or ADHD also have dyslexia.

There has been more research on dyslexia than any other childhood issue. The National Institute of Health and Human Development has been researching dyslexia since 1978 at the request of Congress.

In 1994, The National Institute of Health released their research results which have been independently replicated and are now considered to be irrefutable.

- Early intervention is essential for this population
 - Dyslexia is identifiable with at least 92% accuracy at ages 5 ½ - 6 ½.
 - Dyslexia is due to a difficulty processing language. It is not a visual problem, and people with dyslexia do not see words or letters backwards
 - Reading failure caused through dyslexia is highly preventable through direct, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness.
 - Of children who display reading problems in the first grade, 74% will be poor readers in the 9th grade and into adulthood unless they receive informed and explicit instruction on phonemic awareness.
- Children do not mature out of their reading difficulties.

- The current testing utilized by our nation's public schools to establish eligibility for special education services is not a valid diagnostic test for dyslexia.

Research during the past 100 years does not support the use of grade retention as an intervention for academic achievement. Research also shows that retention at any level is associated with higher high school dropout rates as well as other negative side effects.

More specific research on retention includes:

- Temporary gains may occur but numerous studies show that achievement gains decline two to three years after retention. Without targeted interventions that address the needs of low-achieving students most retained students do not catch up to their nonretained peers.
- Grade retention has a negative effect on all areas of achievement. Most importantly research shows that retention has the most negative effect on reading.
- There is no evidence of any positive effect on long-term school achievement for students who were retained.
- Grade retention predicts health compromising behaviors in adolescents such as emotional distress, poor peer relations, smoking, alcohol use, drug abuse, driving or engaging in sexual activity while under the influence, early onset of sexual activity, suicidal intentions and violent behaviors.
- Adults, who were retained in school as children are more likely to be unemployed, living on public assistance or in prison than adults who did not repeat a grade.

This one issue, unremediated dyslexia connects all the dots, it connects the out of school suspensions and low graduation rates which leads students to the school to prison pipeline. 66% of all state inmates have a learning disability.

We realize that this bill is not meant to be punitive but in reality for the children that will be retained it is. The children want to learn how to read but for some reason they aren't reading at grade level which is due to dyslexia, ineffective reading programs or ineffective teaching.

The solution to this problem is to identify and assess all students for risk of dyslexia and remediate all students who have been identified as being dyslexic.

Based on the collective research on dyslexia we would like to recommend passing a dyslexia law in the State of Michigan which would include:

- Define dyslexia and acknowledge its existence by creating a universal definition and understanding of "dyslexia" in the State education code.

- Mandatory screening tests for all students for dyslexia
- Mandatory dyslexia remediation programs, which can be accessed by both general and special education populations.
- Mandatory teacher training on dyslexia, its warning signs and appropriate interventions strategies. Establish dyslexia and learning disability instruction in the colleges and universities who provide teaching degrees
- Access to appropriate “assistive technology” in the public school setting for students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Accommodate all students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

There are currently at least nine excellent reading programs that are available for the dyslexic student. Some of these programs can be used in the classroom for both the dyslexic and nondyslexic students. There are also highly effective screening tools in use today to screen for the risk of dyslexia.

We have the opportunity to launch a new initiative to ensure that all of Michigan’s students are reading by the end of 3rd grade through innovative programs to identify, screen, remediate, and accommodate dyslexia and related learning disabilities.

Lawrence Kloth's Comments

If this bill becomes a law, I would have been one of those 3rd graders who would have been retained. If I had been retained I would have been profoundly affected. I still would not know that I have dyslexia and would not have been remediated.

I have struggled my entire life with dyslexia and dysgraphia. In 4th grade, I was failing most of my classes and with my parents' permission I left school to be homeschooled. I was fortunate to have the resources to go Denver, Colorado where I was diagnosed with severe dyslexia. Prior to going to Colorado I was diagnosed twice with a reading disorder but received no guidance from anywhere as to how to help me. The diagnosis of dyslexia was a relief and gave me hope that I could be successful.

I did go back to school in 7th grade with accommodations for my dyslexia. I attended Grand Rapids Catholic Central High School who also accommodated me and graduated in 2011. During my junior and senior years I was dual enrolled at Catholic Central and Lake Michigan Academy, a school for learning disabilities. I am currently a junior at Hope College in Holland Michigan. I have a 3.44 GPA and was on the Dean's List both semesters last year. I was recently inducted into the National Political Science Honor Society. I am majoring in Political Science and Leadership. My accommodations at Hope College include a reader and a scribe, extra time, student's notes and use of assistive technology.

Had I been screened for dyslexia at the end of kindergarten and remediated in a reading program that works for dyslexics I would not have had the many struggles I faced and would probably not need as many accommodations as I need in school today.

I am a success story but all dyslexics can be just as successful provided they are identified, screened and correctly remediated.

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